PROMISING PRACTICES IN FIRST NATIONS, MÉTIS AND INUIT EDUCATION

2006/2007 Case Study:

Bishop Routhier Elementary School
Cardston Junior High School

April 2008

Alberta Education

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Compiled by
First Nations, Métis and Inuit Services Branch
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This document is intended primarily for:
System and School Administrators
Alberta Education Executive Team and Managers

And may be of interest to:
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Parents
Education Stakeholders
Community Members

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
2.0	BACKGROUND	7
2.1	FIRST NATIONS, MÉTIS AND INUIT SCHOOL-COMMUNITY LEARNING ENVIRONMENT PROJECT	7
2.2	PROMISING PRACTICES IN FIRST NATIONS, MÉTIS AND INUIT EDUCATION - CASE STUDIES	7
2.3	SCHOOL IDENTIFICATION METHODOLOGY	7
2.4	LITERATURE REVIEW	8
	2.4.1 First Nations, Métis and Inuit Parent and Community Engagement	8
	2.4.2 First Nations, Métis and Inuit Language & Cultural Programming	10
	2.4.3 Teachers, Instruction and Curriculum/Resources	11
	2.4.4 Professional Development	17
	2.4.5 Individual Student Supports	18
3.0	BISHOP ROUTHIER SCHOOL	23
3.1	SCHOOL PROFILE	23
3.2	FIRST NATIONS, MÉTIS AND INUIT STUDENT OUTCOMES	24
	3.2.1 Provincial Achievement Test Results	24
3.3	POSITIVE PRACTICES	25
	3.3.1 First Nations, Métis and Inuit Parent/Community Engagement	25
	3.3.2 First Nations, Métis and Inuit Language and Cultural Programming	26
	3.3.3 Teachers, Instruction and Curriculum/Resources	26
	3.3.4 Professional Development	28
	3.3.5 Individual Student Supports	28
4.0	CARDSTON JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL	31
4.1	SCHOOL PROFILE	31
4.2	FIRST NATIONS, MÉTIS AND INUIT STUDENT OUTCOMES	31
	4.2.1 Provincial Achievement Exams	32

4.3 POSITIVE PRACTICES 32
4.3.1 First Nations, Métis and Inuit Parent/Community Involvement 32
4.3.2 First Nations, Métis and Inuit Language and Cultural Programming 34
4.3.3 Teachers, Instruction and Curriculum/Resources 34
4.3.4 Instructional Strategies and Resources 35
4.3.5 Professional Development Programs 36
4.3.6 Individual Student Supports 36

5.0 SUMMARY 39

5.1 FIRST NATIONS, MÉTIS AND INUIT PARENT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT 39

5.2 FIRST NATIONS, MÉTIS AND INUIT LANGUAGE & CULTURAL PROGRAMMING 40

5.3 TEACHERS, INSTRUCTION, CURRICULUM/RESOURCES 40

5.4 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT 41

5.5 INDIVIDUAL STUDENT SUPPORTS 42

APPENDIX A - School Interview Document

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The report, *Promising Practices in First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education* - Case Studies 2 is part of the ongoing work of Alberta Education's, First Nations, Métis and Inuit Services Branch to identify school based practices that support positive outcomes for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students. This second edition of in-depth case studies of two Alberta schools is part of an ongoing series of First Nations, Métis and Inuit education case studies of Alberta schools in support of a collaborative education system.

The report provides a literature review of current research of promising practices in First Nations, Métis and Inuit education followed by a background section providing an overview of the case studies project. The literature review provides the foundation for the report as it sets out five common themes found in the research regarding promising practices in First Nations, Métis and Inuit education.

School profiles and a summary of individual school performance data provide a backdrop for the review of practices employed in each of the schools. Successful strategies and commonalities of approach are presented in the context of the five research themes. Although approaches varied in each of the schools the following were common to both schools:

First Nations, Métis and Inuit Parent and Community Engagement

In reviewing the individual practices employed by each school to develop positive, supportive relationships with First nations, Métis and Inuit parents and community, three common elements emerged.

Firstly, in both schools, the principal and teachers had primary roles in the development of enhanced relationships with their First Nations, Métis and Inuit parents and community. Bishop Routhier School did not have an on-site First Nations, Métis and Inuit liaison worker however the expectation was that all teachers were to develop positive relationships with parents. Clearly the principal at Bishop Routhier considered his role as being the primary liaison with parents, the community and its leadership. Teachers were expected to be involved in the community, and develop relationships with parents and community members. Cardston Junior High School had an on-site First Nation Elder/liaison worker; in this school environment the Elder/liaison was very active in assisting staff in developing relationships with the First Nation parents and community. The Elder/liaison had a prominent role in assisting the principal with his interactions with the First Nation parents, and the leadership of Kainai First Nation.

Secondly, a common element was that in both communities was strong support for the school. In Bishop Routhier School the community and its leadership rallied behind the school and a common desire for improvement. This resulted in cooperative support for the school, its staff and increased financial assistance to the school. Students attending Cardston Junior High from Kainai First Nation did so by choice. Parents, many of whom had attended the Cardston Junior High School themselves, wanted their children to attend the school and had high expectations of what the school could do for their children. Parents were supportive of the school, its goals and approaches.

Thirdly, a common element was the level of relationship with First Nations, Métis and Inuit parents in both schools that seemed to go beyond the formal to a more personal level. Teachers at Cardston Junior High School were long-term members of the community, knew First Nation families, and in some instances taught the parents of current students. The presence of a highly respected Elder/liaison from the community on the staff of the school provided a bridge between the community and the school. Many of the staff at Bishop Routhier School resided in the community during the school week and were active in the community. Staff was well known by community members from interactions both at the school and in the community. The creation of an informal, welcoming and respectful atmosphere was evident in both schools.

First Nations, Métis and Inuit Language & Cultural Programming

Both Bishop Routhier School and Cardston Junior High Schools provided First Nations, Métis and Inuit and non-First Nations, Métis and Inuit students with opportunities to appreciate the richness of First Nations, Métis and Inuit culture. In addition, both schools provided cultural opportunities for students through structured First Nations, Métis and Inuit culture programs, a Gr.2-6 Métis Studies Program at Bishop Routhier and a Blackfoot Studies Program at Cardston Junior High School. Both schools were supportive of providing students with access to a First Nation language with Cardston Junior High offering Blackfoot as a second language program. Bishop Routhier School indicated that they were hoping to introduce a Cree Language program in the near future.

Teachers, Instruction, Curriculum/Resources

Teachers

The principals of both schools felt it was important to attract teachers who were committed to improving outcomes for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students, had high expectations for student success, were flexible, and demonstrated the ability to develop positive relationships. The principal of Bishop Routhier School actively

recruited teachers who had a demonstrated positive history of working with First Nations, Métis and Inuit students. Cardston Junior High School attributed much of its success to experienced teachers, and an exceptional on-site Elder/liaison worker. Teachers at both schools had received a great deal of professional development in First Nations, Métis and Inuit education over the years providing an invaluable framework for their work with First Nations, Métis and Inuit children.

Instruction

The principals of the two schools indicated that for their schools to be truly responsive to the needs of their First Nations, Métis and Inuit students it was necessary to go beyond standard procedures to develop relationships, attain cultural knowledge, provide a sense of belonging, encourage literacy, and promote academic success. Both schools demonstrated high expectations for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students and a commitment to go beyond the ordinary to assist students to be successful.

Both schools focused on literacy, Bishop Routhier School emphasized reading as part of the core curriculum of the school and set additional time aside for the one-to-one precision reading program. Cardston Junior High School stressed reading in all classes and provided access to an increased focus on literacy in modified programs.

Cardston Junior High School provided for individual student differences through elements of co-operative learning, small working groups, a project orientation to assignments, and differentiated instruction. In addition, Cardston Junior High provided a highly developed modified program in Language Arts and Math for students who were unable to cope with the regular curriculum. Similarly, Bishop Routhier School supported individual differences through differentiated instruction, assessment for learning and maintaining components of Northland School Division's Kîkway Kikiskîyîtîn Project. The Kîkway Kikiskîyîtîn Project is a performance assessment project within the district, please see section 3.3.3 for more information.

Curriculum/Resources

Both schools purchased a wide variety of First Nations, Métis and Inuit resources for their libraries and classrooms. These resources were available for use by all students for leisure reading, and were incorporated into literacy programs and other curriculum areas. Bishop Routhier School did not have a central library but supported class based libraries that contained a significant number of First Nations, Métis and Inuit resources. Both schools were supportive of provincial initiatives to infuse First Nations, Métis and Inuit perspectives into curriculum.

Professional Development

An underlying strength of both Bishop Routhier School and Cardston Junior High School was the experience and knowledge of their respective staff groups and the ongoing First Nations, Métis and Inuit professional development of staff members. The principal of Cardston Junior High noted that First Nations, Métis and Inuit education was a topic on each staff meeting agenda, and each school based professional development day. Bishop Routhier School provided specific opportunities for professional development in First Nations, Métis and Inuit education. Both schools placed an emphasis on learning more about approaches that would benefit their First Nations, Métis and Inuit students. Both schools accessed professional development opportunities related to First Nations, Métis and Inuit education offered by Alberta Education, the Alberta Regional Consortia and other organizations.

Individual Student Supports

Both Bishop Routhier School and Cardston Junior High School provided a degree of wrap around services to assist individual students and families. In addition both school environments were committed to students and their overall wellbeing and success. Some services were easily identified and described whereas others were evident in observations of the overall school environment.

Both schools had open and regularly scheduled access to Elders. Cardston Junior High had a well respected on-site Elder/liaison, while Bishop Routhier Elementary School had easy access to elders due to its community location and support.

Planning for student transition planning was an area of focus for each school with Cardston Junior High paying particular attention to the transition from grade six to seven for students from Kainai First Nation. Initial meetings with parents, the on-site Elder/liaison and school staff were designed to support transitioning students. Bishop Routhier School paid particular attention to early transitions from home to school with strong pre-school programming for younger students. In addition Bishop Routhier School identified the transition from grade six to seven as a major concern that will be addressed with the expansion of the school to grade nine in a new school scheduled to open in 2009.

Both schools were very aware of the need to provide coordinated services and supports to students within their schools to mitigate the impact of poverty and other social issues. Bishop Routhier School provided coordination of services and direct supports to students and parents through the Educational Enhancement

Project partnership with Métis Settlements Child and Family Services Authority. In addition, the school provided many low cost or no cost benefits to students including a lunch program. Cardston Junior High School provided support for First Nations, Métis and Inuit families and students through their family-school liaison counselor, the on-site Elder/liaison and services available within the community of Cardston and Kainai First Nation.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 FIRST NATIONS, MÉTIS AND INUIT SCHOOL - COMMUNITY LEARNING ENVIRONMENT PROJECT

In March 2003, Alberta Education developed the First Nations, Métis and Inuit School-Community Learning Environment Project to assist school jurisdictions in developing approaches to improve outcomes for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students. Implementation of the project occurred during the 2004-05 school year with the objective of addressing the needs of First Nations, Métis and Inuit learners in sixteen pilot schools across Alberta. A collaborative approach among school staffs, Aboriginal parents, Elders, jurisdiction leaders, Alberta Education, and Aboriginal communities resulted in the implementation of a wide variety of innovative practices at individual pilot schools. The *First Nations, Métis and Inuit School-Community Learning Environment Project - Promising Practices Report (2007)* highlighted these promising practices in light of current research.

2.2 PROMISING PRACTICES IN FIRST NATIONS, MÉTIS AND INUIT EDUCATION - CASE STUDIES

Subsequent to the release of the *First Nations, Métis and Inuit School - Community Learning Environment Project - Promising Practices Report (2007)*, Alberta Education released the first in a series of reports entitled *Promising Practices in First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education - Case Studies of Two Alberta Schools (2007)*. The two "case study schools" were pilot schools from the initial First Nations, Métis and Inuit School - Community Learning Environment Project. This report set the stage for an ongoing approach of Alberta Education's, First Nations, Métis and Inuit Services Branch to report the promising practices of two Alberta schools each year.

Promising Practices in First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education two will outline the promising practices identified for Bishop Routhier Elementary School of Northland School Division No. 61 and Cardston Junior High School of Westwind School Division No. 74 based on studies of these two schools conducted during the 2006 - 2007 School year.

2.3 SCHOOL IDENTIFICATION METHODOLOGY

The identification of the two schools for this promising practice report was based on available data, and the recommendations of First Nations, Métis and Inuit Services managers and school jurisdictions. The decision was made to focus on schools with a significant self - identified First Nations, Métis and Inuit student

population that had produced positive Provincial Achievement Test results. In addition, schools were recommended by their First Nations, Métis and Inuit Services manager and school authorities. The criteria for selection were as follows:

- **Number of First Nations, Métis and Inuit Students** - Consideration was given to the number of self identified First Nations, Métis and Inuit students enrolled within each school.

- **First Nations, Métis and Inuit Student Demographics** - The identified schools should serve significantly diverse First Nations, Métis and Inuit student populations. The identification of a junior high school environment was an important goal for this report.

- **Provincial Achievement Test Outcome Data** - Schools were identified based on positive outcomes across the widest number of subtests on the June, 2006 Provincial Achievement Exams at the grade three, six and nine levels.

- **First Nations, Métis and Inuit Services and School Authority Recommendation** - Due to the lack of significant disaggregated First Nations, Métis and Inuit data at the school level there was a reliance on recommendations from First Nations, Métis and Inuit Services Managers and School Authorities.

2.4 LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature available on factors that contribute to First Nations, Métis and Inuit student success in school has increased over the past few years with some common themes emerging. For the purposes of this review these common themes are organized into the following five areas:

- First Nations, Métis and Inuit parent and community engagement,
- First Nations, Métis and Inuit cultural & language programming,
- teachers, instruction and curriculum/resources,
- professional development, and
- individual student supports.

2.4.1 First Nations, Métis and Inuit Parent and Community Engagement

The literature regarding First Nations, Métis and Inuit student success in school suggests a need for strong working partnerships between the school and First Nations, Métis and Inuit parents/community. In a study of 162 small high schools in

Alaska, Kleinfield (1985) noted that the successful schools had strong alliances between teachers and the community. Successful schools exhibited strong teacher/community partnerships, agreement regarding the theme for the educational program, enterprising teaching staff, and a central office that encouraged adapting schooling to meet local needs.

Melnechenko and Horsman (1998) stated that the influence of the family is a large determiner in First Nations, Métis and Inuit student success. The authors write that "Educators have come to know that there is a positive correlation between success at school and positive family influence, support, and relationship" (pg. 9). Bazylak (2002) concurs, stating that "Without family involvement Aboriginal students are less likely to succeed in school" (pg. 139). Bell (2004) in his study of ten Aboriginal schools in Canada also sums up this reoccurring theme in the following statement:

> *The establishment of effective working partnerships between schools, parents and communities is dependent on the formation of a climate of relational trust. Additionally, previous education experiences of parents or community members strongly influence the potential of the school to build effective partnerships. This is particularly significant, given that many Aboriginal communities have had negative experiences in which education was used as a tool of assimilation (pg. 35).*

A recent study of "school-community relations" in a Canadian First Nation Community School, Agbo (2007) provided additional insight into the complexities of this relationship. Results indicated that for collaborative school-community relationships to thrive the school must empower the community through genuine discussions that fosters collaboration and respect for multiple perspectives. Agbo notes that schools must be reformulated in accordance with a different, non-Eurocentric referent if they wish to improve First Nations parents and community involvement (pg. 1).

Clearly schools that can develop positive, supportive relationships with First Nations, Métis and Inuit parents/community are more likely to produce positive outcomes for their First Nations, Métis and Inuit students. The development of such relationships especially in more traditional First Nations environments requires the school to go beyond a Eurocentric view of education to truly empower the First Nations community and demonstrate a respect for multiple perspectives of schooling.

2.4.2 First Nations, Métis and Inuit Language & Cultural Programming

The *Common Curriculum Framework for Aboriginal Language and Culture Programs*, of the Western Canadian Protocol for Collaboration in Basic Education states, "The outcomes for Aboriginals as a Second Language are based on the assumption that language will be taught and used while teaching cultural content," and "Communicative proficiency is the goal of Aboriginal Second Language programs. These statements stress that language teaching should not be taught in isolation of cultural understandings as language is the expression of culture. Battiste (2000) supports the notion that First Nations language and culture are inextricably intertwined and that teaching either aspect in isolation is not ideal. The author goes on to note that Aboriginal languages are the basic media for the transmission and survival of Aboriginal consciousness, cultures, literatures, histories, religions, political institutions, and values. They provide distinctive perspectives on and understandings of the world..." (pg. 199).

First Nations, Métis and Inuit culture and language programs are common in Alberta schools with the majority of programs being cultural in nature, not reflecting the inextricably intertwined programming suggested by Battiste (2000). A number of schools offer second language instruction in Aboriginal languages such as Cree and Blackfoot, these programs tend to provide some cultural context for the language instruction. Considerable effort has been directed to develop resources and support the implementation of these programs.

A number of schools in the province offer First Nations, Métis and Inuit cultural experiences for First Nations, Métis and Inuit and non-First Nations, Métis and Inuit students with these experiences being tied to specific celebrations such as National Aboriginal Day held on June 21st each year. Isolated cultural experiences for students within the school context require careful planning and pre and post activities to incorporate these experiences into the curriculum and expand the knowledge base of all students.

Demmert (2001) noted that "Studies conducted in the past 30 years collectively, provide strong evidence that Native language and cultural programs—and student identification with such programs—are associated with improved academic performance, decreased dropout rates, improved school attendance rates, decreased clinical symptoms, and improved personal behavior" (p. 16). The presence of culture and language programs in schools is seen as less alien and people in the community are more inclined to become involved in the education process (McLaughlin, 1992).

There is considerable research indicating the positive effects of Aboriginal bilingual and immersion programs. Case studies in three separate Alaskan communities with schools offering bilingual or bicultural classes showed satisfied parents, excellent student attitudes and excellent test scores (McBeath, McDiarmid, & Shepro, 1982). A study of four indigenous language programs in New Zealand and Hawaii also produced similar results with decreased dropout rates, increased sense of heritage and identity and improved test scores (Stiles, 1997).

Schools that provide meaningful language and cultural programming for their First Nations, Métis and Inuit students capitalize on a powerful positive practice supported by current literature. It is also evident in the literature that language and culture are intrinsically intertwined and school programming should reflect this reality.

2.4.3 Teachers, Instruction and Curriculum/Resources

Teachers

As is the case with all students, classrooms that offer First Nations, Métis and Inuit students engaging educational experiences provide greater opportunities for success. Clearly the most important component of this educational experience is the teacher. Bazylak (2002) notes that teachers who are able to build strong, healthy relationships built on trust and mutual respect play a significant role in the success of First Nations, Métis and Inuit students. This importance is echoed by Welnechenko and Horsman (1998) in their study of factors that contribute to First Nations, Métis and Inuit student success in school in grades 6 to 9. They maintain that "relationship-building is a prerequisite to a positive classroom environment" (pg. 12).

Cleary and Peacock (1998) describe successful methods and teacher behaviors that work with First Nations, Métis and Inuit students as including: the need to build trust; to connect with the community; to establish cultural relevance in the curriculum; to tap intrinsic motivation for learning; to use humor; to establish family support; to provide situations that yield small successes; to make personal connections with students; to use highly engaging, activity-based learning and, in some cases, cooperative learning; to provide role models; to be flexible, fair, and consistent; and to provide a real audience and purpose for student work.

McBride & McKee (2001) in reviewing highly successful school jurisdictions in British Columbia noted those districts encouraged teachers to reach out to the First Nations, Métis and Inuit community, recognize cultural diversity within the school culture, and to have expectations for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students in keeping with all other students (pg. 61).

Teachers with low expectations for their First Nations, Métis and Inuit students are seen as having a detrimental impact on the success of First Nations, Métis and Inuit students. Digman, Mroczka, and Brady (1995) note that low teacher expectations and counseling of First Nations, Métis and Inuit students into vocationally oriented curricula have been identified as factors contributing to student attrition (pg. 10). Bazylak (2002) in a study of successful First Nations, Métis and Inuit high school students observe that "the participants revealed high teacher expectations as a factor that encouraged their success in school" but qualified this by indicating that the teacher needed to ensure there was room for flexibility in their expectations (pg. 147).

In addition to the successful characteristics explained above, research also suggests that First Nations, Métis and Inuit teachers can play an important role in the educational success of First Nations, Métis and Inuit youth. Mackay and Myles (1995), in a discussion of First Nations, Métis and Inuit student retention and dropout rates, identify First Nations, Métis and Inuit teachers and/or assistants as an important support for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students in high school. The authors note that "schools in which Native students enjoy a high rate of success are those with principals who actively promote strategies for maximizing the academic success of all their students. The principals of such schools have successfully recruited Native teachers and/or assistants" (pg. 174). Kanu (2003), in a study of teacher's perceptions of the integration of First Nations, Métis and Inuit culture into the high school curriculum also notes the unique contribution First Nations, Métis and Inuit teachers /assistants made toward meaningful integration of First Nations, Métis and Inuit perspectives. The author concluded that "The provincial government must work in concert with faculties of education to put more effort and resources into the training and hiring of Aboriginal teachers" (pg. 63).

Schools that hire teachers who have high/flexible expectations and are able to build strong, healthy relationships with their students built on trust and mutual respect have a greater chance of success in the education of their First Nations, Métis and Inuit students. In addition to the successful characteristics noted above, research suggests that First Nations, Métis and Inuit teachers can play an important role in the educational success of First Nations, Métis and Inuit youth.

Instruction

Demmert (2001) states "Successful classroom teachers are able to organize their classes and adjust their teaching strategies in a way that motivates, engages, and challenges students to learn. An often unrecognized factor that influences these organizational skills and teaching strategies is the cultural context in which learning takes place. Ingagalls, (2006) in discussing more traditional First Nations communities noted that "Culture plays an important role in influencing a child's learning process and the skills that are learned. American Indian students' cultural heritage often conflicts with mainstream school practices" (pg. 25).

Other researchers have looked more specifically at instructional factors that have a positive influence on First Nations, Métis and Inuit student achievement. Brancov (1994) suggested that an informal classroom organization, culturally relevant material and group work produced positive results. McCarty (1991) suggested that changing the classroom learning environment to support open-ended questioning, inductive/analytic reasoning, and student participation in a cultural context resulted in increased student participation. In addition, flexible furniture arrangements, group work, shared locus of control by teachers and pupils, cooperative learning, collaborative group work and increased opportunities for dialogue all have been identified as having a positive impact on First Nations, Métis and Inuit student success.

Garrett (2003) in discussing the cultural discontinuity of Native American students in schools had a number of suggestions to improve classroom practice. Suggestions included the following:

- Introduce more opportunities for visual and oral learning styles.
- Use culturally relevant materials when possible.
- Respect family and tribe-related absences.
- Invite Native American mentors, such as Elders from the community.
- Encourage peer tutoring and cooperative group learning approaches to emphasize cooperation and sharing.
- Practice inter-group competition (rather than individual competition) in the classroom.
- Stress short-term goals oriented more to the present with traditional Native students.
- Model behaviors and skills, with an emphasis on personal choice, to help Native American students distinguish which behaviors are appropriate for which situation.

Garrett goes on to give the following advice to school service professionals working with Native youth; "determine (a) the degree of cultural commitment; (b) whether the youth comes from a reservation or rural or urban setting; and (c) what tribal structure, customs, and beliefs are relevant to the situation in order to determine the presence and magnitude of cultural discontinuity" (pg. 233).

Ingalls (2006) in a study of educational practices used in an American First Nation's school in a more traditional community outlines a list of commonly used teaching methods that were incompatible with this population and the reasons for this incompatibility. The author goes on to list possible approaches to address this incompatibility. An example of this incompatibility is that students are expected to answer questions in class when called upon and are expected to volunteer to answer questions in class. The author notes that for this particular cultural group, answering a question may be interpreted as being boastful or competitive, especially when another student had failed to answer the question correctly or not at all (pg. 20). Poirier (2007), Berger (2006) in studies conducted in Northern Inuit communities further develop the impact of competing cultural views regarding Inuit educational success. Clearly, educators must be aware of the competing cultural views that exist in classrooms and mitigate their impact without eroding the cultural uniqueness of the students being educated.

Powers (2005) in a study of 240 urban American Indian youth in two large urban Midwestern cities in the United States attempted to identify educational variables that were negatively correlated with students' age concluded that;

> *"Addressing cultural discontinuity may or may not improve achievement among older American Indian students. However, sufficient access to meaningful learning opportunities, supportive teachers and safe schools is likely to propagate school success" (pg. 341).*

Safe schools with supportive, relational teachers that provide meaningful learning opportunities for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students provide the best overall environment for First Nations, Métis and Inuit student success. Classrooms that are informal in nature encourage cooperative learning, group work, support open-ended questioning, inductive/analytic reasoning and student participation, produce positive results for their First Nations, Métis and Inuit students. In addition, researchers encourage educators to carefully examine conflicting norms between school cultures and First Nations, Métis and Inuit cultures especially in more traditional First Nations, Métis and Inuit settings.

Resources

First Nations, Métis and Inuit cultural knowledge and perspectives in the school curriculum and among teachers has been identified as a significant factor in First Nations, Métis and Inuit student success, promoting calls for the inclusion of First Nations, Métis and Inuit cultural perspective across school curricula and teacher education programs (Binda, 2001 & McAlpine, 2001). This sentiment is echoed by Kelting-Gibson (2006) in a discussion of the "Indian Education for All" initiative in Montana, notes that American Indian students "still attend schools where they do not see themselves reflected in the school's guiding principles, in the curriculum, or even in their own classrooms" (pg. 204). Considerable work has been undertaken in Alberta in order to provide classroom teachers with culturally appropriate First Nations, Métis and Inuit content across the curriculum. Currently the infusion of First Nations, Métis and Inuit perspectives into Alberta's Programs of Study is underway. In addition, the Aboriginal Studies 10/20/30 program provides high schools in Alberta with a unique opportunity to provide meaningful, culturally relevant programs to their First Nations, Métis and Inuit and non-First Nations, Métis and Inuit students.

Kanu (2005) in a study of the integration of First Nations, Métis and Inuit culture into the high school curriculum endorses the current initiative in Alberta stating: "Curriculum development units must include Aboriginal culture, content, issues, topics and perspectives as an integral part of the school curriculum in every subject area" (pg. 12). Aikenhead and Huntley (1999) further suggest that teachers who want to help First Nations, Métis and Inuit students through the integration of First Nations, Métis and Inuit perspectives into the school curriculum must be provided with the appropriate instructional resources to do so.

Kanu (2006) undertook a small in-dept study involving 31 urban grade nine First Nations, Métis and Inuit students in two social studies classrooms, one classroom being an integrated pilot class the other a control group. The study was designed to identify:

a) the most effective ways to integrate Native cultural knowledge and perspectives into curriculum,
b) the impact such integration on achievement, class attendance, and school retention, and
c) critical elements of instruction that appear to affect academic achievement, class attendance and school retention.

Assistance was provided to the pilot teacher in integrating First Nations, Métis and Inuit perspectives into:

a) student learning outcomes,
b) instructional methods and strategies,
c) learning resources and materials,
d) assessment strategies, and
e) underlying curriculum philosophy.

The author found that:

- First Nations, Métis and Inuit students in the pilot class significantly out performed the control group in academic achievement and demonstrated a broader understanding of social studies content, higher level thinking, and improved self-confidence,
- no differences in physical attendance and regularity although differing reasons for attendance in both groups, and
- no apparent connection between student attrition and the integration of First Nations, Métis and Inuit perspectives.

The author (Kanu 2006) goes on to identify the following critical elements of instruction:

- Increased teacher capacity, "suggesting that successful integration requires sensitive caring teachers who are knowledgeable about Native issues and cultures and value them sufficiently to integrate them into school curriculum on a consistent basis" (pg. 133).
- The identification of First Nations, Métis and Inuit student learning outcomes for each unit and integrating these outcomes at the lesson planning stage.
- The integration of First Nations, Métis and Inuit teaching methods - most notably a) the use of story, b) guest First Nations, Métis and Inuit speakers, c) field trips to First Nations communities, d) discussion circles.
- The integration of First Nations, Métis and Inuit perspectives into resources appeared to promote breadth and depth of understanding of curriculum content and higher cognitive skills.
- Some assessment strategies, such as the use of individual journals, seemed to be more effective than others.
- The development of a learning environment that created opportunities for First Nations, Métis and Inuit student voice and where students felt they were treated with respect.

The thoughtful infusion of First Nations, Métis and Inuit culture, issues and perspectives across the curriculum and access to appropriate instructional resources to support this infusion are integral to First Nations, Métis and Inuit student success. The systematic approach to building teacher capacity in First Nations, Métis and Inuit education is a critical support to this infusion.

2.4.4 Professional Development

Current research in First Nations, Métis and Inuit education recognizes that the majority of teachers feel ill-prepared to meet the emerging demands regarding the education of First Nations, Métis and Inuit students. Starnes (2006) in discussing lessons learned as a white teacher teaching Indian children on the Chippewa-Cree reservation in northern Montana noted;

> *"The first (lesson) is how very little we know about the ways Native American children learn. We don't recognize the chasm that exists between their needs and our traditionally accepted curricula and methods. The second is how difficult it is for even the most skilled and dedicated white teachers to teach well when we know so little about the history, culture, and communities in which we teach - and when what we do know has been derived from a white education. In such cases, solid teaching skills, good intentions, hard work, and loving the kids just aren't enough. There is too much we don't know about teaching Native American children and what we don't know definitely hurts them" (pg. 2).*

Although there is an increase in culturally appropriate content available to teachers there has been little research on teachers' perceptions of the integration of First Nations, Métis and Inuit cultural knowledge and perspectives into school curriculum. Kanu (2005) in a study of ten high school teachers' perceptions of the integration of First Nations, Métis and Inuit cultural knowledge and perspectives into the teaching of the Manitoba high school curriculum noted that:

> *"Although these teachers were unanimous in their agreement that the social studies curriculum was assimilating Aboriginal students through omission or token additions of Aboriginal perspectives, they unwittingly contributed to this process of assimilation by allowing the curriculum topics, not Aboriginal issues/perspective/s/, to remain at the center of their teaching. The teachers perceived integration as occasionally adding Aboriginal perspectives, where convenient, to a curriculum that remained largely Eurocentric" (pg. 6).*

Kanu (2005) provides ten recommendations to assist policymakers and educators to successfully integrate First Nations, Métis and Inuit perspectives into curriculum, the first recommendation being;

"School and faculties of education should provide opportunities for all teachers, non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal alike, to learn about Aboriginal culture, issues, and perspectives. This is best done through pre-service teacher education program and in schools, through professional development opportunities for practicing teachers and the utilization of the expertise of Aboriginal community members. In both routes, priority should be given to educating teachers about Aboriginal issues, Aboriginal pedagogical practices and social interaction patterns, particular ways that varying groups of Aboriginal students best learn, background knowledge about Aboriginal students in teachers' classrooms, and support systems for Aboriginal student learning in the public school system" (pg. 12).

In discussing the impact of the "Indian Education for All" legislation in Montana, Kelting-Gibson (2006) supports Kanu's (2005) recommendations in stating that as they begin to implement the legislation educators "will need a strong program of professional development that emphasizes both gaining knowledge about the tribes and developing the strategies necessary to infuse that knowledge into classroom instruction" (pg. 205). The author goes on to support the idea of the long term approach to this professional development gap is a more vibrant program of pre-service education.

Clearly, to be successful, schools require access to effective professional development programs that engage teachers in meaningful experiences regarding First Nations, Métis and Inuit culture, issues, and perspectives.

2.4.5 Individual Student Supports

Planning for student transitions and ongoing services to individuals within the school setting are important factors to First Nations, Métis and Inuit student success. Reyhner (1992) in reviewing research regarding drop out rates of First Nations, Métis and Inuit students noted that dropout prevention included support services outside of the classroom from school administrators and counselors who work closely with parents. Schools across Alberta provide a service safety net to assist students with a wide variety of issues ranging from frequent transitions, to issues of poverty and school alienation. Approaches include extensive transition planning, on-site counseling and social work, leadership and mentorship programming and the utilization of a holistic approach to education. These interventions are important to ensure success for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students.

Elders

The involvement of First Nations and Métis Elders to assist staff members, students and families has become increasingly common in Alberta schools. Schools have found community Elders to be of great value in sharing cultural knowledge,

acting as positive/non-stereotypical role models, assisting staff and First Nations, Métis and Inuit students to understand and mitigate the effects of the cultural discontinuity referred to by Garrett (2003) and providing direct assistance to individual students and families. Kanu, (2002) identified Elders as a great source of cultural, community and family information as well as assisting individual students improve their behavior. Auger (1997) noted that "Just as there are many roots forming the foundation of one tree, so are there many Elders, each one distinct in his or her own right and with his or her own knowledge, forming the foundation of Sakaw Cree traditional education. Through lifelong experience, our Elders are our knowledge-carriers; through their wisdom and spiritual insights, they are our knowledge definers" (pg. 332).

Many Elders hold highly respected positions because of their earned wisdom. They are considered to be the knowledge keepers, making them master teachers of the values and mores of our children. It is a natural transition to have Elders involved in the education of children.

Transition Planning

Many First Nations, Métis and Inuit students struggle with transitions from one educational level to the next; from rural to urban settings; from one school to another and the initial transition from home to early childhood programs. St. Germaine, (1995) linked high drop out rates of Aboriginal students at the high school level in America to obstacles faced during the transition to these schools. The author supports the notion that a cultural discontinuity exists for students raised and schooled in a distinctive culture of their own being thrust into a school system that promotes the values of the majority culture. If the resulting clash of cultures continues, the minority child may feel forced to choose one culture at the expense of the other.

This is often the situation in Alberta where First Nations, Métis and Inuit students attend on-reserve schools for elementary and junior high school years and then are moved to a provincial school for the high school years. Wilson (1991) in a study of Canadian First Nations, Métis and Inuit students observes that "upon entering the large predominantly white high school, they (First Nations, Métis and Inuit students) faced racial prejudice, isolation, low expectations of teachers, and a structure which appeared to them to have been designed for their failure, and they failed, practically overnight" (pg. 371). St. Germaine (1995) provided educators with a number of promising practices that would increase successful transitions some of the more significant recommendations were to:

- avoid large comprehensive high schools,
- encourage positive teacher-student interactions,

- recruit more First Nations, Métis and Inuit teachers,
- encourage active learning strategies where students are encouraged to interact with peers, instructors, and their environment,
- use a culturally relevant curriculum,
- use assessment for learning approaches,
- hold high expectations, and
- increased parental involvement.

The Australian education system, like our Alberta system is seeking appropriate strategies to enhance the learning and teaching of First Nations, Métis and Inuit students. Dockett (2004) in a study of successful transitions to school of young Aboriginal students in the *Australian Starting School Research Project* describes a common desire on the part of Aboriginal parents for their children which encourages a positive start to school and instills enthusiasm to succeed at school. The author noted that Aboriginal children and families can approach this transition as not merely a one-way journey towards something better, but a period of two way interactions ensuring that the child's culture is not left behind. Dockett (2004) identified a number of elements in schools that supported this first transition from home to school significant elements included:

- a visible Aboriginal presence at the school,
- opportunities to express and maintain their Aboriginal identity,
- strategies to invite families and communities into the school and value their involvement,
- flexibility to encourage family-school connections,
- respect for Aboriginal families and the strengths they embody,
- access to mainstream educational curricula, complemented by opportunities to engage with Aboriginal languages and culture,
- high expectations of the learning capabilities of Aboriginal children,
- flexibility of organization,
- access to appropriate health services, and
- opportunities to view school as a worthwhile and positive place.

Mentorship Programs

Jackson (2003) in reviewing the reasons for the success of fifteen Native American college students highlighted the positive impact of structured mentoring programs that connected advanced Native American students with beginning students. This may be another means of addressing the potential isolation of Native American students on campuses. The authors found that structured mentoring programs had the potential to mitigate the potentially negative influences of friends and provided students with role models for reconciling the conflicting pressures inherent in developing a bi-cultural identity.

Issues of Poverty

Many First Nations, Métis and Inuit students are faced with issues associated with poverty that impede their success at school. School administrators, counselors, Aboriginal liaison workers and school based social workers are well aware of the impact of poverty on First Nations, Métis and Inuit students and many schools go beyond a narrow definition of education to assist students and families. St. Germaine (1995) in reviewing dropout rates among American Indian and Alaska native students concluded that a significant factor in the high drop out rate, beyond cultural discontinuity for these students, was the conflict caused by maintaining societal arrangements that produce substantial poverty within a nation of affluence and concentrate such poverty in certain groups, including American Indians and Alaska Natives.

Sense of Belonging

An important factor in individual student success in school is the need to feel that you are part of or have a place in the school environment - essentially one needs to feel he/she belongs. Powers (2005) notes that "a lack of interpersonal relationships with school personal puts American Indian students at a disadvantage because those social bonds are critical to fostering a sense of belonging to school that leads to students' confidence in their own academic abilities and availability of educators to provide academic support".

Sherman & Sherman, (1990) make a case for the development of school environments that are personal in nature, with small class and program size, low pupil-teacher ratios, program autonomy, and a supportive school environment to decrease student dropout rates. The authors noted that many students who have not met with success in the regular school program have been alienated by large, bureaucratic systems that do not respond to their unique needs.

Reyhner (1992) suggests that smaller schools can allow a greater percentage of students to participate in extra- curricular activities. Students participating in these activities, especially sports when excessive travel is not required, drop out less frequently. Reyher (1992) goes on to suggest that it is essential that schools working with First Nations, Métis and Inuit students need to recruit teachers that take an individual interest in their students and are warm, supportive and caring in nature.

When classroom environments are inviting and respectful of First Nations, Métis and Inuit cultural values, students are more likely to be successful. A significant factor to student success is creating a classroom where students believe they belong. (Whitbeck, 2001 and Coggins, 1997)

Elders, transition planning, mentorship programs, approaches that mitigate the effects of poverty and develop a sense of belonging are examples of wrap around services that support First Nations, Métis and Inuit learners.

3.0 SCHOOL #1: BISHOP ROUTHIER SCHOOL

Jurisdiction: Northland School Division No. 61

3.1 SCHOOL PROFILE

Bishop Routhier School is a small K-6 elementary school located 53 kilometers from High Prairie and is part of Northland School Division No. 61. The school student population was approximately 114 First Nations, Métis and Inuit students and 19 staff. At the time of this review a total of 38 students at Bishop Routhier were considered to have moderate to severe learning disabilities. All students are from the Peavine Métis Settlement. Junior High Students from Peavine are bused to High Prairie for their junior and senior high school years. Future plans are to expand the Bishop Routhier School to grade 9 in the hope that this change will help address some of the issues around bussing and retention of students at the junior and senior high school levels.

The school is located on the Peavine Métis Settlement, a Métis settlement that is proud of its diverse cultural backgrounds, for example Cree, French, and Scottish. The predominant languages on the settlement are English and Cree. The leadership in the community consists of one settlement leader, four councilors and a five person local school board. The chairperson of the Peavine School Board was a member of the Northland School Division's Corporate School Board. The Community was a very sports minded community with competitive teams in a number of sports including hockey and baseball. In recent years the community has greatly increased its support to Bishop Routhier School.

Bishop Routhier School has undergone significant changes over the past three years highlighted by a renewed commitment by the community and a new administration for the school. The leadership of the community, the school district and the new principal had taken major proactive steps to improve the learning environment of the school to support teaching and learning. These steps included a more cooperative approach to discipline, a focus on teaching, improvement of attendance and the creation of a safe and caring environment. Issues regarding discipline have dropped considerably because of the community involvement.

The majority of the school staff resided in the community during the week with a number of teachers having permanent housing outside the community. Two teachers live outside the community and commuted to work on a daily basis. The new administration of the school has recruited a number of teachers with knowledge and experience in teaching First Nations, Métis and Inuit students from other Northland School Division schools. Two teachers have taught at Bishop Routhier for a number of years.

The school itself is an older facility that will be replaced during the 2008-2009 school year. The school has a kitchen that supports a snack and lunch program for students. The school gym is used by the community on an ongoing basis.

The principal of the school indicated that parents at Bishop Routhier School valued education and the overall view of residents of Peavine Métis Settlement was that education is a necessary tool in today's changing world. Members of the community are active in local business with a number of individuals owning their own businesses within the Peavine Settlement and in neighboring communities. The community was very supportive of the school and invited the school staff to community events and activities. The staff of the school was very active in the community, attended sporting events, cultural and family activities and felt valued by the community in return.

3.2 FIRST NATIONS, METIS AND INUIT STUDENT OUTCOMES

Students at Bishop Routhier School participated in the Provincial Achievement Test program at grades three and six. Multiyear trend reports 2002-2006 indicated strong growth over the past four years at the grade three level and growth at the grade six level over the past two years. Prior level of achievement results indicated that grade six students at Bishop Routhier, writing Provincial Achievement Tests in June 2006, achieved a level consistent with projections based on their grade three Provincial Achievement Tests results.

3.2.1 Provincial Achievement Test Results

2005 - 2006 Grade Three Results

Bishop Routhier School posted extremely high participation rates for English Language Arts and Mathematics (100%) at the grade three level.

In addition, grade three students reaching the acceptable standard (student writing) were above the provincial achievement average in both Mathematics and English Language Arts. Results at the Standard of Excellence (students writing) in both Mathematics and English Language Arts were below the provincial averages.

2005 - 2006 Grade Six Result

Provincial Achievement Test participation rates (66% - 86%) for grade six students at Bishop Routhier School were below the provincial average. Students reaching Acceptable Standard (students writing) were above the provincial average in English Language Arts, Mathematics and Science. Students reaching acceptable

standard (students writing) were slightly below the provincial average in Social Studies. In all subjects grade six students at Bishop Routhier School scored below the provincial average at the standard of excellence.

3.3 POSITIVE PRACTICES

3.3.1 FIRST NATIONS, METIS AND INUIT PARENT/COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Leadership of Peavine Métis Settlement

- Actively supported the school.
- Hired a director to assist with an after school recreation program.
- Provided extra funds to the school to purchase resources.

Bishop Routhier School Staff

- The majority live within the community during the school week.
- Are active within the Peavine Métis Settlement, they attended functions, sporting activities, cultural and family events.
- The Principal was very willing to go beyond the confines of the school to meet and chat with parents.
- The Principal is available to parents at any time to discuss their child or issues with the school.
- The Principal and teaching staff are the primary liaisons with the parents and the community; Bishop Routhier does not have First Nations, Métis and Inuit liaison.
- Initially, to establish rapport and commitment to the school, the current principal met with parents by knocking on doors, to share information, identify issues, and ask for parental support for the school.
- All staff (including the bus driver) takes personal responsibility for the safety of the students.

The School Environment

- The school was seen as a major community center and community programs are supported by the administration of the school.
- The school operated a homework night every Wednesday night which coincided with School Board Meetings, general parent meetings and other programs.
- The school building was open for students/parents to come into the building prior to school opening in the morning.
- Parents were encouraged to remain at the school after they dropped off their children for the day.

- Parents were encouraged to drop into classes to watch what teachers were doing - and could talk to teachers.
- Parents can contact their children at any time, go to the classrooms, bring lunches in or talk to their children - not an overabundance of access rules.

3.3.2 First Nations, Métis and Inuit Language and Cultural Programming

- Although Bishop Routhier School provided students with cultural programming the leadership of Peavine Métis Settlement indicated that the school needed to focus on excellence in student outcomes.
- The school has an active culture program that focused on providing students with cultural activities and events.
- Students also went beyond the school and the settlement (field trips) to learn more about the Métis culture.
- A locally developed Métis studies program was provided to students in grades two through six.
- Local community members and community Elders provided students with first hand knowledge of the local history, culture and connections to the heritage of the settlement.
- The administration of the school was interested in hiring a qualified First Nations, Métis and Inuit Cree language teacher to build a quality long term Cree Language Program.

3.3.3 TEACHERS, INSTRUCTION AND CURRICULUM/RESOURCES

Teachers

- In recruiting teaching staff an effort was made to attract staff with a positive history of working with First Nations, Métis and Inuit students.
- Many teaching staff either taught for the principal in other schools or were known by the principal.
- Teachers were expected to be actively committed to students.
- Teachers were encouraged to hold high expectations for students and the school strives to ensure that outcomes are high to match expectations.
- There was an expectation that teachers would be active in the community to develop positive relationships with parents, students and community members.

Support Staff

- Support staff at Bishop Routhier are seen as key elements in assisting student learning especially in reading.
- The majority of support staff have post secondary education.

- All support staff live in the community and are well aware of student family histories and the current realities of the community.

Instructional Strategies and Resources

- Literacy and reading are major areas of focus for the school with considerable time and resources devoted to improvement in this area.
- The school has provided students with increased access to computers; there is emphasis on students developing keyboarding skills.
- Bishop Routhier School used Differentiated Instruction within classrooms to support student learning.
- Bishop Routhier School used the Scholastic Guided Reading Series and developed a Precision Reading Program for all students.
    - Precision Reading is a one-on-one instructional activity that was developed by Dr. Rick Freeze, Professor of Inclusive Special Education at the University of Manitoba, Faculty of Education.
    - All staff participated in the guided reading program which runs for 40 uninterrupted minutes daily.

- The school utilized a number of ongoing assessment strategies including the Jerry Johns Inventory and the Gage Reading Test to assist in establishing the student's functional grade level.
- Bishop Routhier School does not have a central library, all library materials are in individual classrooms for ongoing student use.
- Bishop Routhier School attributed some of its academic success to the Kîkway Kikiskîyîtîn Project developed by Northland School Division as part of a division wide AISI project.

i. **The goals of this project were:**

1. To promote the established pattern of continuous improvement in student learning.
2. To increase the number of grades 3, 6 and 9 students that score at the acceptable level or above on the Provincial Achievement Tests English, Language Arts and Mathematics.
3. To establish and entrench an effective process for continuous improvement of instructional practices of teachers.
4. To embrace assessment for learning as a tool to increase academic achievement.

ii. **Key Strategies of the Kîkway Kikiskîyîtîn Project were as follows:**

1. Formation of teams of teachers and training them in general curricular and assessment strategies.
2. In-service for team members on language arts and math assessment practices and procedures.
3. Guide teacher teams in the creation of test instruments, rubrics, exemplars and guides.
4. In-service all grade 1 through 9 teachers in math and language arts assessment practices.
5. Administer, mark and analyze test instruments created by the teacher teams.
6. Create/refine language arts and math assessment in-service documents to serve as guides and instructional resources for grades 2 through 7.

3.3.4 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Northland School Division provided some on-site consultant support and funding to individual schools to support ongoing professional development.
- Schools decided the themes of their Professional Development Program to address school goals.
- Bishop Routhier School had eight professional development days during the school year with some being full days and others being half day workshops.
- Professional Development topics over the past few years have included First Nations, Métis and Inuit education and specific instructional strategies.
- Staff was encouraged to attend additional professional development opportunities offered through the Northwest Learning Consortium and other sources.

3.3.5 INDIVIDUAL STUDENT SUPPORTS

Educational Enhancement Project

- This was a joint project between Bishop Routhier School and Métis Settlements Child and Family Services Authority.
- The mission of the project was to enhance children's quality of life and maximize their learning potential, through involvement and interventions within the child's social system.
- These involvements and interventions included services and supports for the child, parents/caregivers, teaching staff, and the community.
- These supports included educational services, psychological services, speech and language services, occupational therapy, medical services and community involvement.

- A main focus was on building bridges between home-life and school-life, involving parents in children's progress and developing overlapping goals and interventions.
- Children in the program quickly understood there was a strong relationship between the school and home and felt the support and consistency.
- The intended outcome of this increased coordination and support between the home and the school was a strong emphasis on the importance of education, and sharing of resources and insight into the child's well-being.
- The project had a central coordinator who was situated at Bishop Routhier and oversaw daily case management of each child in the program.
- The majority of children in the program live in Peavine Métis Settlement and attend Bishop Routhier School.
- The after-school recreational program sponsored by the Peavine Métis Settlement provided a wide variety of recreational opportunities for students.
- Community elders supported individual students and provided connections to Métis heritage and local history.
- A vital support to individual students at Bishop Routhier School was provided by the school staff. An underlying connectedness seems to exist among staff, parents and the community to make a difference for students on an individual/personal level.

4.0 SCHOOL #2: CARDSTON JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Jurisdiction: Westwind School Division No. 74

4.1 SCHOOL PROFILE

Cardston Junior High School is the only junior high school in Cardston and is part of Westwind School Division No. 74. Cardston is situated in the low foothills of southwest Alberta, approximately 25 km north of the Canada/US border. To the north, Cardston borders the Kainai First Nation, the largest reserve in Canada. Forty kilometers to the west of Cardston is Waterton Lakes National Park.

Cardston Junior High School is a culturally diverse community with about 1/3 of its students residing on a nearby First Nation Community. At the time of this review, Cardston Junior High School had a total student enrolment of 313 students of which 92 were First Nations, Métis and Inuit students. The school is the pride of the community and Westwind School Division which was quite evident in its overall appearance and welcoming atmosphere. Clearly the school had taken steps over time to make their First Nations, Métis and Inuit population feel that they were an important group in the school including the display of many First Nations, Métis and Inuit pictures and artifacts. The majority of residents of Cardston are members of the Church of the Latter Day Saints.

The school principal indicated that the majority of parents of children attending the school are very supportive of the school. Parental involvement and support was evident and resulted in 70-80% attendance at Parent - Teacher interviews and school events. A large number of First Nations parents, who previously attended the school as students, choose to send their children to Cardston Junior High School because of their personal positive experiences.

Kainai Board of Education and Westwind School Division have entered into a tuition agreement to facilitate First Nations students from Kainai attending Cardston Junior High School. Other First Nations, Métis and Inuit students from the Cardston community also attend the school.

4.2 FIRST NATIONS, METIS AND INUIT STUDENT OUTCOMES

Cardston Junior High School has a long history of success with First Nations, Métis and Inuit students and was recommended for this research by Westwind School Division and First Nations, Métis and Inuit Services Staff working in southern Alberta.

Cardston Junior High School participates in the Provincial Achievement Test program at the grade nine level. At the time of this review, disaggregated First

Nations, Métis and Inuit results at the school level were not available. The results of these tests are for the entire grade nine student population.

4.2.1 Provincial Achievement Exams

2005 -2006 Grade Nine Results

Multiyear Reports indicate that participation rates for Cardston Junior High School are slightly below (82% - 84%) provincial average in all four subject areas.

Grade nine students reaching the Acceptable Standard (student writing) were above the provincial achievement averages in English Language Arts, Mathematics and Social Studies and Science.

Results at the Standard of Excellence (students writing) in Social Studies, Mathematics and English Language Arts were above the provincial averages and results for Science were slightly below the provincial average.

Prior Level of Achievement Results indicated that grade nine students at Cardston Junior High, writing Provincial Achievement Tests in June 2006 achieved at a level consistent with projections based on their grade six Provincial Achievement Test results in English Language Arts and above projections in Mathematics.

4.3 POSITIVE PRACTICES

4.3.1 First Nations, Métis and Inuit Parent/Community Involvement

A good relationship exists between the two communities, First Nations parents felt comfortable in contacting teachers to discuss the progress of their children and the teachers feel comfortable in contacting.

The underlying strength of Cardston Junior High School was having a well respected First Nations Elder on-site as a liaison. The liaison's primary goal is to assist school staff in developing their own relationships with the First Nations, Métis and Inuit community and providing critical advice to the Administration and teaching staff regarding situations involving First Nations, Métis and Inuit students, families and the broader First Nations, Métis and Inuit community.

Cardston Junior High School Staff

- The philosophy of the school is that there are cultural differences among students and it is important to recognize that there are differences, to be sensitive to those differences, have high expectations, and treat all students as equal - (being sensitive to cultural differences that define equality).
- The current staff of the school generally have been at the school for a number of years and in many cases have taught the parents of current First Nations, Métis and Inuit students.
- Individual staff members knew families including First Nations families on a personal basis.
- Communications between the school staff and the First Nations, Métis and Inuit parents are characterized as being excellent; built on a foundation of respect and understanding.
- Prior to the Parent Teacher Interviews, the Principal calls and invites First Nations, Métis and Inuit parents.
- With the increase in computer access by First Nations, Métis and Inuit parents; the school has begun to provide up-to-date student information online. Student attendance, and grades are posted online and weekly reports are emailed to parents.

First Nations, Métis and Inuit Community

- Kainai Board of Education, operates K-12 schools in the First Nation Community and has positive relationships with the Cardston Junior High School.
- A large number of First Nations parents previously attended the school and from their own positive experience, choose to send their children to this school.
- The First Nations community invited the school staff to attend local functions and family activities.
- There are four First Nations positions on the School Council reserved for members of the First Nations Community. If no one from the community volunteers for these positions the school recruits First Nations parents.
- The First Nations, Métis and Inuit parent population was very supportive of the school and looks to the school to work collaborative with them to find solutions that are in their child's best interest.

On-Site Elder/ First Nations, Métis and Inuit Liaison

- The onsite Elder/liaison was highly respected in both the school and First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities.
- A significant component of the role of this person was to provide school staff with advice regarding appropriate protocols with the First Nation community and facilitate positive relationship building between staff and parents.

- In addition, the Elder/liaison accompanied the schools Family Liaison councilor and occasionally the school administrator on First Nations, Métis and Inuit parent home visits.
- The Elder/liaison was very familiar with the history of First Nations, Métis and Inuit families, and the current realities of the community.

4.3.2 First Nations, Métis and Inuit Language and Cultural Programming

- A Blackfoot language/culture program was offered every day as an option available to all students.
- Resource people/elders from the First Nation community assist the school with cultural presentations and cultural events.
- The school hired a First Nation teacher who taught all students and is also the designated teacher in the First Nation language and culture class along with the Elder/liaison.
- First Nations culture/perspectives were included in the school program/activities where it was meaningful and there was a natural fit with the school activity/celebration.

4.3.3 Teachers, Instruction and Curriculum/Resources

Teachers

The majority of the teachers reside in the community of Cardston.

- New teachers to the school are provided with a cultural awareness workshop by the resident Elder/Liaison and First Nations Teacher to provide them with an understanding and background of the First Nations, Métis and Inuit community, families and students.
- Teachers in the school consult with the resident Elder/liaison when dealing with First Nations, Métis and Inuit community/parents, and for assistance in integrating First Nations, Métis and Inuit perspectives into the school/classroom program.
- Teachers were encouraged to become aware of and sensitive to the unique emotional needs of their First Nations, Métis and Inuit students. For example: The close ties among families and extended families may result in significant grief at the loss of an extended family member such as a great aunt whom they have known as a grandmother in Blackfoot Kinship.
- In most cases new teachers to the school were from Cardston, have grown up attending schools in Cardston and have ongoing relationships with the local First Nations Community.
- The teachers of Cardston Junior High have remained at the school for a number of years and are very familiar with the First Nations community and individual

families. In many cases the teachers have taught the parents of current students.

- Some of the staff of the school had personal ties to members of the First Nations community and attend family functions such as weddings, and funerals.

4.3.4 Instructional Strategies and Resources

- Cardston Junior High school used elements of co-operative learning, small working groups, a project orientation to assignments, and differentiated instruction to support student learning.
- The school's approach to all students including First Nations, Métis and Inuit students was based on a philosophy of high expectations and individual student accountability.
- The school was committed to early assessment of student abilities and has developed its assessment strategies to identify educational gaps early and provide appropriate interventions.
- Complimentary courses offered at the school include Native Culture and Blackfoot Language programs.
- The school manually disaggregated its First Nations, Métis and Inuit performance data, at the school level, to evaluate the impact of programming; note, this data is confidential and is for internal use only.
- The school's differentiated instructional approach provided some modification to student programs within the regular classroom as well as some pull - out modified programs.
- There was a reading component in all classes with the exception of mathematics.
- Modified programs are available (with parental permission) in language arts and mathematics at grades 7/8/9. Consideration was given to extending the modified programming to all core subjects to alleviate student frustration.
- Students, parents and teaching staff are involved in decision making regarding placement in the modified program. Ideally students through this involvement feel they are part of the process and feel that "*This is where they need to be*". The goal of the placement approach is to have students and parents feel that the placement is done "*with them, not to them*".
- Within the pull-out, modified program:
    - Literacy and literacy skill development are areas of significant focus.
    - Students can transition back to the regular program and are not "locked into" the modified program.
    - The curriculum follows the regular curriculum as much as possible allowing for students transition back to the regular program.
    - Ongoing testing to ensure the appropriateness of the program for the student.

- In extreme cases the individual student program is developed at the student's performance level (example: If a student is operating at the grade three level in Mathematics the program is offered at this grade level).

- The school has purchased teacher and First Nations, Métis and Inuit resources to support the curriculum; the Elder/liaison provided input regarding these purchases.
- The school plans to increase their First Nations, Métis and Inuit library collection.

4.3.5 Professional Development Programs

- Cardston Junior High School provided focused Professional Development days for staff on First Nations, Métis and Inuit education topics.
- The school was well aware of the need for ongoing First Nations, Métis and Inuit professional development given that this population is a major component of the school.
- Time was allocated to First Nations, Métis and Inuit education during every school based professional development day.
- The Elder/liaison has time set aside at each staff meeting for a teaching on First Nations culture.

4.3.6 Individual Student Supports

Transition Planning

Students transferring from the First Nations school

- There was an initial meeting of school staff, parent/guardian, student, Elder/liaison to discuss the student background information, school programs and individual student supports to reduce misunderstandings and open lines of communication.
- Academic achievement was not a determinant as to whether a student is accepted into Cardston Junior High School. First Nations students of all abilities are welcomed into the school.

All grade six students transferring into the school

The following supports and approaches are used by Cardston Junior High to support their new grade seven students:

- Counseling was available to all students.

- First Nations, Métis and Inuit students were made aware of the on-site First Nations Elder/liaison.
- The school is divided into small cross - graded character education groups called **Prides** containing 14-15 students and led by a staff member. Students in the **Prides** group have lockers together, and meet twice a month for half an hour with their staff leader. The staff leader is responsible for maintaining a connection to the students and assisting them when possible.

Character Education Program

Cardston Junior High School was committed to providing all students with a safe environment where cultural and religious diversity is celebrated. The school has introduced a Character Education program designed to assist all students to develop the virtues of empathy, conscience, self-control, respect, kindness, tolerance and fairness. Since the time of this review, the school has expanded its character education program to include a "pyramids of intervention" program that focuses on behaviors and attitudes that limit students from experiencing success. The program goal is to create, in students, a sense of greater personal student responsibility for learning and to increase parent involvement.

Elders

A major student support at Cardston Junior High School was a very active and involved on-site Elder/liaison who was well connected to individual students, parents, staff and the general First Nations, Métis and Inuit community. The Elder/liaison's role included sharing cultural knowledge, acting as positive/non-stereotypical role model, assisting staff and First Nations, Métis and Inuit students to understand and mitigate the effects of the cultural discontinuity referred to by Garrett (2003) and providing direct assistance to individual students and families. The strength of this position goes well beyond the position itself and is rooted in the individual and their reputation in the school system and the First Nation Community.

5.0 SUMMARY

The principals of Bishop Routhier School and Cardston Junior High School were of great assistance in identifying what they felt were the significant positive practices in their respective schools. Staff from Alberta Education conducted individual principal interviews based on an interview guide (Appendix A) developed specifically for this project. Principals were provided with the interview guide in advance and were encouraged to provide written responses in addition to the interview itself. Interviews were taped to assist with the accuracy of responses. The following practices were applicable to both schools.

5.1 FIRST NATIONS, METIS AND INUIT PARENT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

In reviewing the individual practices employed by each school to develop positive, supportive relationships with First Nations, Métis and Inuit parents and community, three common elements emerged.

Firstly, in both schools, the principal and teachers had primary roles in the development of enhanced relationships with their First Nations, Métis and Inuit parents and community. Bishop Routhier School did not have an on-site First Nations, Métis and Inuit liaison worker and the expectation was that all teachers were to develop positive relationships with parents. Clearly the principal at Bishop Routhier considered his role as being the primary liaison with parents, the community and its leadership. Teachers were expected to be involved in the community, and develop relationships with parents and community members. Cardston Junior High School had an on-site Elder/liaison worker; in this school environment the Elder/liaison was very active in assisting staff in developing relationships with First Nations, Métis and Inuit parents and community. The Elder/liaison had a prominent role in assisting the principal with his interactions with First Nations, Métis and Inuit parents, and the leadership of Kainai First Nation.

Secondly, in both communities there was strong support for the school. In Bishop Routhier School the community and its leadership had rallied behind the school and a common desire for improvement. This resulted in cooperative support for the school, its staff and increased financial assistance to the school. Students attending Cardston Junior High from Kainai First Nation did so by choice. Parents, many of whom had attended the Cardston Junior High School themselves, wanted their children to attend the school and had high expectations of what the school could do for their children. Parents were supportive of the school, its goals and approaches.

Thirdly, the level of relationship with First Nations, Métis and Inuit parents in both schools seemed to go beyond the formal to a more personal level. Teachers at Cardston Junior High School were long-term members of the community, knew First Nations, Métis and Inuit families, and in some instances had taught the parents of current students. The presence of a highly respected Elder from the community on the staff of the school provided a bridge between the community and the school. Many of the staff at Bishop Routhier School resided in the community during the school week and were active in the community. Staff were well known by community members from interactions both at the school and in the community. The creation of an informal, welcoming and respectful atmosphere was evident in both schools.

5.2 FIRST NATIONS, METIS AND INUIT LANGUAGE & CULTURAL PROGRAMMING

Both Bishop Routhier School and Cardston Junior High Schools provided First Nations, Métis and Inuit and non- First Nations, Métis and Inuit students with opportunities to appreciate the richness of First Nations, Métis and Inuit culture. In addition both schools provided cultural opportunities for students through structured First Nations, Métis and Inuit Culture programs, a Gr.2-6 Métis Studies Program at Bishop Routhier and a Blackfoot Studies Program at Cardston Junior High School. Both schools were supportive of providing students with access to a First Nation language with Cardston Junior High offering Blackfoot as a second language program. Bishop Routhier School indicated that they were hoping to introduce a Cree language program in the near future.

5.3 TEACHERS, INSTRUCTION, CURRICULUM/RESOURCES

Teachers

The principals of both schools felt it was important to attract teachers who were committed to improving outcomes for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students, had high expectations, were flexible and demonstrated the ability to develop positive relationships. The principal of Bishop Routhier School actively recruited teachers who had a demonstrated positive history of working with First Nations, Métis and Inuit students. Cardston Junior High School attributed much of its success to experienced teachers, and an exceptional on-site Elder/liaison worker. Teachers at both schools had received a great deal of professional development in First Nations, Métis and Inuit education over the years providing an invaluable framework for their work with First Nations, Métis and Inuit children.

Instruction

The principals of the two schools indicated that for their schools to be truly responsive to the needs of their First Nations, Métis and Inuit students it was necessary to go beyond standard procedures to develop relationships, attain cultural knowledge, provide a sense of belonging, encourage literacy, and promote academic success. Both schools demonstrated high expectations for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students and a commitment to go beyond the ordinary to assist students to be successful.

Both schools had a focus on literacy, Bishop Routhier School emphasized reading as part of the core curriculum of the school and set additional time aside for the one-to-one Precision Reading program. Cardston Junior High School stressed reading in all classes and provided access to an increased focus on literacy in modified programs.

Cardston Junior High School addressed for individual student differences through elements of co-operative learning, small working groups, project orientation to assignments, and differentiated instruction. In addition, Cardston Junior High provided a highly developed modified program in Language Arts and Math for students who were unable to cope with the regular curricula. Similarly, Bishop Routhier School supported individual differences through differentiated instruction, assessment for learning and maintaining components of Northland School Division's Kîkway Kikiskîyîtîn Project.

Curriculum/Resources

Both schools had purchased a wide variety of First Nations, Métis and Inuit resources for their libraries and classrooms. These resources were available for use by all students for leisure reading, and were incorporated into literacy programs and other curriculum areas. Bishop Routhier School did not have a central library but supported class based libraries that contained a significant number of First Nations, Métis and Inuit resources. Both schools were supportive of provincial initiatives to infuse First Nations, Métis and Inuit perspectives into curricula.

5.4 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

An underlying strength of both Bishop Routhier School and Cardston Junior High School was the experience and knowledge of their respective staff groups and the ongoing First Nations, Métis and Inuit professional development of staff members. The principal of Cardston Junior High noted that First Nations, Métis and Inuit education was a topic on each staff meeting agenda, and a part of each school

based professional development day. Bishop Routhier School provided specific opportunities for professional development in First Nations, Métis and Inuit education. Both schools placed an emphasis on learning more about strategies that would benefit their First Nations, Métis and Inuit students. Both schools accessed professional development opportunities related to First Nations, Métis and Inuit education offered by Alberta Education, the Alberta Regional Consortia and other reputable organizations.

5.5 INDIVIDUAL STUDENT SUPPORTS

Both Bishop Routhier School and Cardston Junior High School provided a degree of wrap around services to assist individual students and families. In addition both school environments were committed to students and their overall wellbeing and success. Some services were easily identified and described whereas others were evident in observations of the overall school environment.

Both schools had open, regularly scheduled access to Elders. Cardston Junior High had a well respected on-site Elder/liaison, while Bishop Routhier Elementary School had easy access to elders due to its community location and support.

Planning for student transition planning was an area of focus for each school with Cardston Junior High paying particular attention to the transition from grade six to seven for students from Kainai First Nation. Initial meetings with parents, the on-site Elder/liaison and school staff were designed to support transitioning students. Bishop Routhier School paid particular attention to early transitions from home to school with strong pre-school programming for younger students. In addition Bishop Routhier School had identified the transition from grade six to seven as a major concern that will be addressed with the expansion of the school to grade nine in a new school scheduled to open in 2009.

Both schools were very aware of the need to provide coordinated services and supports to students within their schools to mitigate the impact of poverty and other social issues. Bishop Routhier School provided coordination of services and direct support to students and parents through the Educational Enhancement Project partnership with Métis Settlements Child and Family Services Authority. In addition the school provided many low cost or no cost benefits to students including a lunch program. Cardston Junior High School provided support for First Nations, Métis and Inuit families and students through their family-school liaison counselor, the on-site Elder/liaison and services available within the community of Cardston and Kainai First Nation.

POSITIVE PRACTICES IN ABORIGINAL EDUCATION

SCHOOL INTERVIEW DOCUMENT

Name of School: _____ Date: _____

Principal: _____ Interviewed by: _____

CURRENT STUDENT POPULATION

	ECS		Grade 1		Grade 2		Grade 3		Grade 4		Grade 5		Grade 6	
	FNMI	Non - FNMI	FNMI	Non - FNMI	FNMI	Non - FNMI	FNMI	Non - FNMI	FNMI	Non - FNMI	FNMI	Non - FNMI	FNMI	Non - FNMI
# Of Students														

Grade 7		Grade 8		Grade 9		Grade 10		Grade 11		Grade 12	
FNMI	Non - FNMI	FNMI	Non - FNMI	FNMI	Non - FNMI	FNMI	Non - FNMI	- FNMI	Non - FNMI	FNMI	Non - FNMI

SCHOOL PROFILE

1. Please describe the community surrounding your school and the "wider school community" if students travel to your school from outside your immediate community?
2. Could you describe your FNMI community?
3. How is your school viewed by these communities?
4. How is your school viewed within the School District?
5. Describe your teaching staff in general: general teaching experience, how long at the school.
6. Can you talk a little about your support staff: experience, etc?
7. Can you tell us about your school facility and resources?
8. Do you receive any targeted funding for FNMI programming?

CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

9. How would you describe your student body (general ability, mobility, special education needs, and other factors that define your school population)?
10. What are your student's families like (socio – economic status, support for school, and other factors that define your school population)?

FNMI STUDENT OUTCOMES

11. Could you talk about your PAT results over the past five years especially in terms of your FNMI student population?

12. Is there data, in addition to your PAT results, which you would like to include in this study?

POSITIVE PRACTICES

School Vision *(If there is a written school vision/mission statement please attach a copy)*

13. Could you talk a little about your school's vision for the education of FNMI students?

14. Would you say that this is a common vision among staff and the school community?

    a. If so, what were the key elements to developing this common vision?

Barriers to FNMI Student Success

15. What were some initial barriers to success for your FNMI students and how did you address these barriers?

FNMI Parent/Community Involvement

16. What strategies have you employed to actively involve FNMI parents in your school? What are the most successful?

17. How do you involve the broader FNMI Community in the life of your school? What methods are the most successful?

18. Are there specific approaches to reporting to parents that have been particularly successful?

FNMI Cultural and Language Programming

19. Could you describe the FNMI language programming at your school?

20. What cultural programs are offered at your school? Are they demonstrations or are they participatory in nature?

21. Are there opportunities for FNMI /Non-FNMI students to participate in Cultural programming offered at the school?

22. How is the FNMI community involved in these programs?

Teachers

23. Do you have any staff positions specifically designated to assist FNMI students and families? (i.e. Aboriginal Liaison Worker)

24. Could you provide an overview of the duties of this/these positions?

25. How have these positions impacted FNMI students?

26. Do you have any FNMI teaching staff? Support staff?

27. What are the important characteristics you look for when you are adding new staff to your school?

Instruction

28. What specific approaches to teaching and learning have proven to be the most successful for you in improving FNMI student outcomes?

29. Are there any specific programs that you have used that have been successful with your FNMI students? (Literacy Programs, Aboriginal Studies)

30. Are there specific assessment strategies the school has employed that are particularly successful with your FNMI students?

31. What is the school's approach to homework?

32. What is the overall impact of these initiatives on your FNMI students?

Curriculum

33. What strategies have you used to infuse FNMI perspectives into the curriculum in your school?
34. What has been the impact at your school of Alberta Education initiatives in the infusion of FNMI perspectives into the new Social Studies Curriculum?

35. Do you offer students a specific FNMI studies course?

36. What is the overall impact of these initiatives on your FNMI students?

Resources

37. Has the school purchased Aboriginal resources for use in the library and classrooms?

38. How does the school use these resources?

39. Have these resources made a difference to your FNMI students?

Professional Development Programs

40. Has your staff been involved in an FNMI professional development program? If so could you please describe it and the topics you have included in the program?

41. What approach to FNMI Professional Development do you feel has the most positive long term impact on staff?

Individual Student Supports

42. Does your school have any Leadership or Mentorship programs for your FNMI students? If so could you describe them and comment on their impact.

43. Do you have a specific approach to provide counseling services to your FNMI students? (i.e. Elder counseling/ FNMI social worker)

44. Do you have a specific Career Development strategy for your FNMI students? If so could you describe it and comment on its impact?

FINAL COMMENTS

45. Is there anything you would like to add at this time (something we have missed) or a need to clarify or expand on any topic we have discussed?

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